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ABSTRACT

In school psychology the supervision of practicum experiences is widely acknowledged as a critical component of training, yet little research has been devoted to systematically conceptualizing, practicing, or evaluating the process of supervision for psychologists-in-training. Students and faculty in school psychology made attributions to the importance of supervision across a three-year period of training. Students ranked their supervisor's administrative role of field site coordinators as most vital, followed by their educative role of technical assistance and guidance in professional development, and their personal and emotional support least important. Both faculty and students perceived the supervisory relationship as becoming less structured and more mutual across three years of study, with declining emphasis on technical assistance as students became more competent, confident, and independent. Additionally, faculty and students shared a perception of sharply declining need for technical assistance in assessment over time, but sustained emphasis in intervention and professional development. The congruence in perceptions suggests that a common framework defines the supervisory process in school psychology, which is not unlike that of other disciplines such as social work and clinical psychology. (Author/JAC)

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The Role of Supervision in School Psychology Training: Views of Students and Faculty

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Running head: Role of Supervision

The Role of Supervision in School Psychology Training: Views of Students and Faculty

In many applied areas of psychology, and especially school psychology, the supervision of practicum experiences is widely acknowledged as a critical component of training, yet little research has been devoted to systematically conceptualizing, practicing, or evaluating the process of supervision of psychologists in training. An effective model of supervision must incorporate the training program's philosophy, the needs of students at different levels of training, and expected changes in knowledge, skills, and confidence that occur as a student progresses through training. Careful coordination and integration of supervised practicum experiences and coursework are necessary. It follows that the absence of a viable model of supervision, or, inadequate implementation, may result in critical training gaps.

It is a primary assumption that all supervisors have a model or conceptualization of what supervision ought to be and how it ought to be done, although this model may not be clearly conceptualized or articulated (Strein, Note 1). On an individual level, a model provides the supervisor a framework with which to evaluate and modify supervisory practices. At the program level, a model facilitates planning, evaluation, and feedback about the supervision component of training with regard to overall training goals and program structure.

The dimensions common to both individual and program models of supervision provide a basis for comparing the "fit" between supervisors' experience and training, and supervision needs of the program, revealing possible gaps in the training process. In addition, an articulated model of supervision provides a framework for interrelating the goals of training and research findings on the nature of effective supervision.

The Nature of Supervision

Although there is no substantial literature in school psychology, studies of supervision have been made in the specialites of clinical psychology (Ekstein, & Wallerstein, 1958), counseling psychology (Galassi, in press; Worthington & Roehlke, 1979), psychiatry (Cohen & DeBetz, 1977), and social work (Kadushin, 1976) which are broadly applicable. In social work, for example, Kadushin (1976) distinguishes three functions of supervision: administrative, educational, and supportive, all of which are found in the training of school psychologists. It is the premise of the current paper that in school psychology training, the educational function is clearly predominant, referring not only to instruction in the skills and practices basic to school psychology, but also guidance in the areas of personal and professional development necessary for ethical and competent practice. The supportive function of supervision lends encouragement and assurance to supervisees' acquisition and development of new skills and professional roles, but it, together with administrative duties, is deemed secondary to educational responsibilities.

Research on the characteristics of effective supervision suggests that supervisors and trainees may have discrepant perceptions of what contributes to effective supervision. A study of beginning counseling trainees by Worthington and Roehlke (1979) found that supervisors considered giving accurate feedback, both positive and negative, as the primary activity of effective supervision, providing support was of secondary significance. Didactic or instructional activities were not viewed by supervisors as vital in the supervisory process. Across three measures of supervisor effectiveness, supervisees rated the three characteristics of supportiveness, positive relationship, and direct teaching of skills as most highly related to effective supervision. These findings are in part supported by another study (Hedlund, Hayden & Mordock, 1979) in which predoctoral internship trainees rated relationship variables, including supervisor tolerance, empathy, openness, and professional respect, as most critical to effective supervision.

A Reference Model for Training

The Scientific Problem Solver Model (Burke, Haworth & Brantley, 1980), used by the UNC-CH School Psychology Program, provides one framework for analyzing and understanding the process of supervision in training in terms of the training core: assessment, intervention, research, evaluation, and professional development. This model can be used to specify (Haworth & Brantley, 1981) the breadth and depth of training expected through coursework in each area. Externships (practica) concurrent with coursework at each level of training,

provide the experiential component through which knowledge and skills are applied in the problem solving process. The conceptual relationship of coursework to supervision experiences during training in the core areas is depicted in Figure 1. Coursework and supervision

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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should complement each other in the training process, as supervision focuses and refines the knowledge and skills acquired through coursework. The desired relationship is one in which supervision both broadens and deepens the knowledge base beyond coursework. Redundant overlap between course emphasis and supervision is to be avoided, as are substantial gaps between the two areas. As students gain in knowledge and skills the responsibility of the supervisor lessens for initiating and systematizing the experiential analogues of training, and shifts to a mode of responding to student initiated problem-solving, which is still educational in nature. As training shifts at the doctoral level (NASP Standards for Credentialing in School Psychology, 1978) to an emphasis on indirect, system level services (consultation, program development, evaluation, etc.), supervision helps students to replace the role of direct service provider with one of collaborative consultant (Pryzwansky, 1974). Out of these considerations, as they apply in the UNC-CH program, came expectations that: 1) both supervisors and students would perceive greater emphasis being placed on educative responsibilities than on supportive or administrative

functions in supervision across all years, 2) perceived need for technical supervision would decline across training years as increased knowledge is acquired, and 3) the perceived need for supervisor-initiated activity would decrease across years as student-initiated activity increases.

The present study was designed to systematically describe the perceptions of faculty and students about the preferred characteristics of supervision, within a school psychology program following the SPS model. The following broad dimensions were examined: changes in the nature and content of supervision across students' years of training, differences in faculty versus students' views of supervision, and the place of supervision experiences in the larger program training model.

Method

Participants

The supervision survey was administered to all supervising faculty (N=5), and students currently engaged in practica (N=17) in the school psychology program at the University of North Carolina, in October of 1979, approximately two months after the beginning of the academic year. Students included first, second, and third year doctoral students, and first and second year masters students. A 100 percent return was obtained from students, and an 80 percent return was received from supervising faculty.

Survey Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed for use by training supervisors and students. Questionnaire items were identical for both faculty and

students, however, instructions for the groups differed. Faculty were asked to describe their supervisory activities; students were asked to describe preferred supervisory practices within the current program. Faculty were requested to respond to supervisory practices at all three levels of training (Years I, II, III); student responses were constrained to their current year of training.

Survey items dealt with the following areas:

Purposes of supervision - Survey respondents were asked to rank order supervisory functions with regard to their importance for training.

Relationship variables - Preference ratings for supervisory relationship characteristics along dimensions such as "directive" versus "non-directive".

Technical and professional development - Ratings of the importance of supervisory content related to areas of training. For example, respondents were asked to rate the importance of "Technical assistance with intervention" on a five-point scale from very important to minimally important.

The scientific method - The importance of supervision in each of six steps in the systematic solution of applied problems following the scientific method approach, rated on a five step scale from very important to unimportant. The six steps were: problem analysis, programs planning, program development, program implementation, evaluation and dissemination (from the Scientific Problem Solving Model, Burke, Haworth & Brantley, 1980).

Supervisee evaluation - Attitudes toward grading practices based on a four letter system (H = excellent, P = pass, L = low pass and F = failing).

In analyzing the results of the questionnaire, technical and professional development items were grouped by training model categories. The training model categories of "assessment" and "intervention" included responses to one question concerning supervision in each of these areas. The category of "professional development" includes responses to questions concerning ethical and legal issues, the development of consultation and interpersonal skills, and characteristics of the student's personal style in relation to professional functioning. The "internship/externship" category includes setting-specific activities such as dealing with issues of professional role in a given setting or relating specific practicum experiences to broader professional issues.

Medians were computed on all variables as a basis for descriptive analysis.

Results and Discussion

Purpose of Supervision

Students rank ordered the purposes of supervision as follows, to:

1) to assist students in acquiring a wide range of practicum experiences, 2) provide guidance in professional development, 3) provide technical assistance on practicum activities, and 4) provide personal and emotional support. Faculty rankings followed the same ordering.

Although the educative function was assumed of primary importance at the onset of the study, survey results suggested that both students and faculty perceived a basic administrative function, the widening of practicum experience, as a more important responsibility. It is, perhaps, not surprising to find highest priority given to this aspect, considering each supervisor's role as coordinator and liaison representative to their respective field site. The educative functions of supervision involving guidance of professional development and technical assistance, were indeed ranked next in importance, and personal and emotional support were ranked last.

Relationship Variables

Responses of both faculty and students suggested that the supervisory relationship was perceived as becoming less structured and more mutual across years as the student's level of professional development increases. Both students and faculty expressed congruent preferences that supervision progress from a "moderately" supervisor-directed and authoritative interaction in the first year of training to a "highly" non-directive and mutual problem-solving approach in the latter years of training. Thus supervision appears to involve a shift in responsibilities and initiative from supervisor to student as the student becomes more competent, more confident, and prepares

for independent functioning.

Technical and Professional Development

Faculty and student responses by training model areas are illustrated in Figure 2. For students, the judged importance

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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of technical assistance in assessment decreased across years of training from "very important" to "minimally important"; in intervention, degree of importance was moderate across years. Emphasis on supervision of professional development and externship/internship activities was of high to moderate importance across years. Supervising faculty's emphasis on technical assistance in both assessment and intervention declined systematically across years from "very important" to "relatively unimportant", suggesting a perception of increasing student competence. Faculty rated the importance of supervision in professional development as "highly" to "moderately" important each year. Internship/externship emphasis increased from "moderate" importance the first year of training to "moderately high" importance in years 2 and 3.

To some degree, faculty tend to perceive the first year of supervision as more highly skill-oriented, while students place more importance on concerns about professional development and functioning effectively within the role expectations and constraints of the particular practicum setting. At the second and third year levels, however, faculty are less basic-skill oriented than students. During the second year, faculty place greater emphasis on professional development, and meeting the constraints and role expectations of a specific setting. By year three, the ratings of faculty and students converge on the importance of supervision in the areas of professional development and internship/externship.

Within the UNC program, an early emphasis on attainment and demonstration of competence in administration, scoring, interpreting and reporting as assessment skills, may account for the uniform decline in perceived importance of assessment supervision by both faculty and students. In the area of intervention, however, new methods and techniques of intervention introduced each year may contribute to students' continued emphasis on supervision across years. Except for faculty ratings in the first year, technical assistance on intervention was consistently rated as more important in supervision than was assessment.

The Scientific Method

Assessment of the importance of the six steps of the Scientific Problem Solving Model revealed negligible differences in ratings. The six processing steps were generally rated as of "moderately high" to "high" importance during the first year of training and as of

"moderate" to "moderately high" importance during years 2 and 3.

Supervisee Evaluation

The assigning of grades for supervised experiences amounts to potential jeopardy for the supervisory relationship. The evaluation of students under supervision must be made on many complex criteria: the student's entry level of knowledge and skill, effective application of new knowledge, personal and professional growth and development, productive use made of supervision, and more. In addition, context variables may lie entirely outside the control of the student or the program, e.g., resources, constraints and opportunities actually present at a given field site, which determine student roles.

An index of concern about these complexities was sought in attitudes toward externship grading in the current study. Both faculty and students favored the simplest, least differentiated pass/fail alternative. Faculty's comments reflected their awareness of the difficulties inherent in assigning objective grades to individuals with different styles at sites with different needs, and their concerns that the need to evaluate interferred with the colleagial relationship desired in supervision.

The overwhelming majority of students and half of the faculty perceived criterion-referenced grading to be preferable over norm-referenced grading. Several faculty expressed the view that there were merits to both methods, but that competency criteria were not available and probably could not practically be developed so that evaluation could be conducted in a non-mechanical way. Both faculty

and students appeared to clearly favor evaluation according to the unique demands of the site, rather than evaluation purely on the basis of program-standardized criteria. A number of respondents, both faculty and students, perceived a combination of program-standardized and site-specific criteria to be desirable.

Conclusions

To the extent that faculty and students agree in their perceptions of supervision, there is then evidence that a conceptual framework exists in common. The current study of supervision in one program found reasonable agreement between students' expectations and training supervisors' perceptions of the desirable aspects of supervision as they experience it, suggesting that a common framework or model does indeed exist.

Survey results support the assumption that the educative function of supervision in the training program under study takes precedence over the possible supportive function; however, the results also clearly document the importance of the administrative function of the faculty supervisor. Within the context of the training model it is evident that only the supervisor is able to function in this administrative and liaison capacity, assuring the breadth of training experiences.

The results of the current survey indicate both students and faculty are in agreement upon the importance of technical assistance through supervision, in assessment and intervention, for the beginning student. Faculty show a greater tendency than students to see training

as progressing from an emphasis on skill acquisition to a relative emphasis on issues of professional functioning, whereas students' relative preference is for supervision in all areas of practicum functioning at all years, with the exception of the decreasing importance of assessment across years.

Both faculty and students perceived a shift from supervisor-initiated activities to student-initiated activities to be desirable in supervision. This shift reflects perceived changes in supervisor-directiveness and authoritativeness in problem-solving to a more mutual and colleagial relationship. This greater independence and assumption of responsibility by the supervisee may not be an inevitable accompaniment to skill development, but may need to be actively shaped and encouraged by the supervisor.

In formulating a model of supervision for use in training school psychologists, the discrepancies between faculty and student responses leave one with the question of "Who is right?" or "Which is better?". Presumably, faculty possess a clearer understanding of the desired goals and outcomes of training, and the skills and qualities needed to be a competent professional school psychologist. Students, on the other hand, may be more aware of their current abilities: their skill level, their feelings of confidence and competence, the specific areas of functioning in which they encounter problems in practicum or areas in which they perform well. In the final analysis, it must be kept in mind that both faculty and students have unique information to contribute to a developing supervision model in school psychology.

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Footnotes

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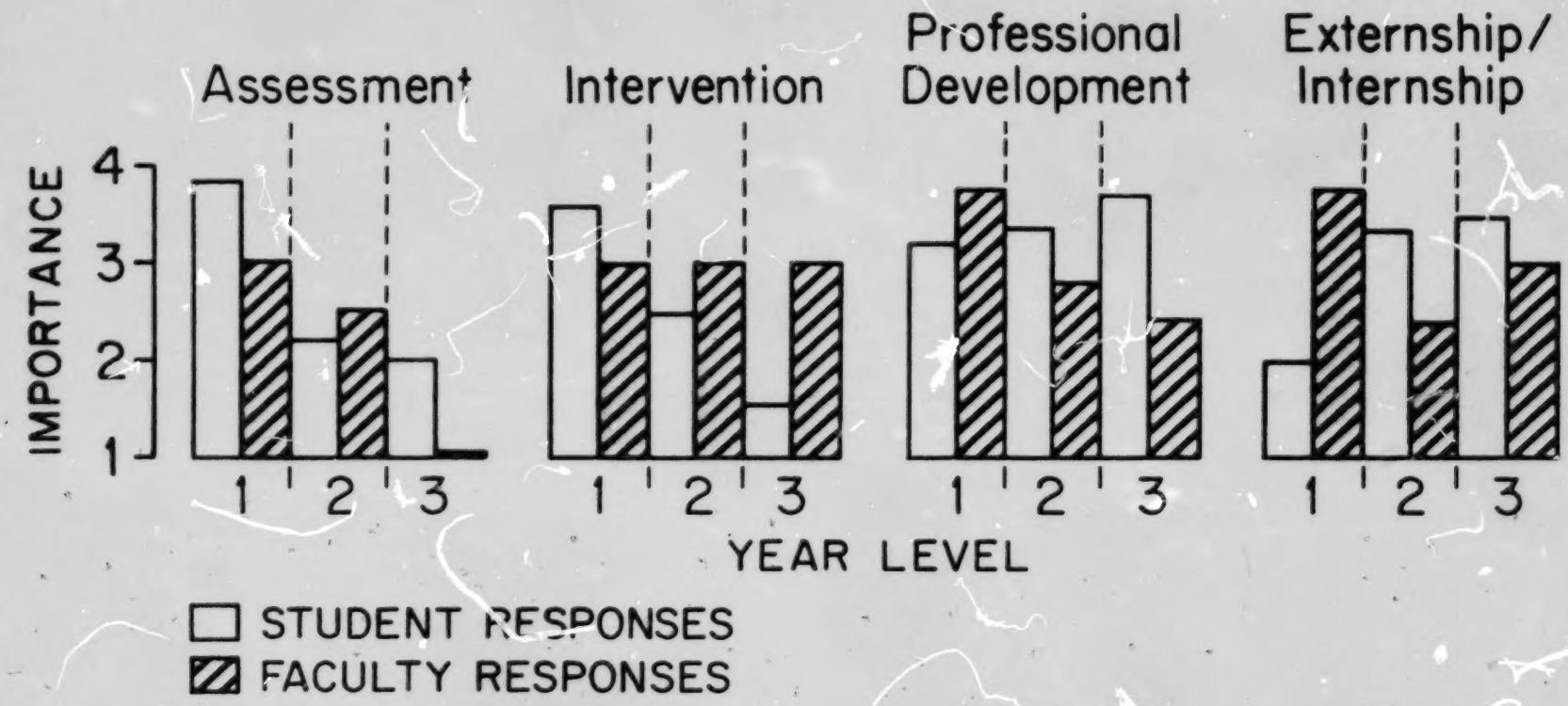
Figure Captions

Figure 1. The relative emphasis of coursework and supervision in the basic training core areas, within the UNC-CH training model.

Figure 2. Student and faculty ratings of the importance of supervisory activities in training model areas, by supervisee year in training (4 = very important, 3 = moderately high importance, 2 = moderately important, 1 = relatively unimportant).


Assessment
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Professional Development
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IMPORTANCE
4
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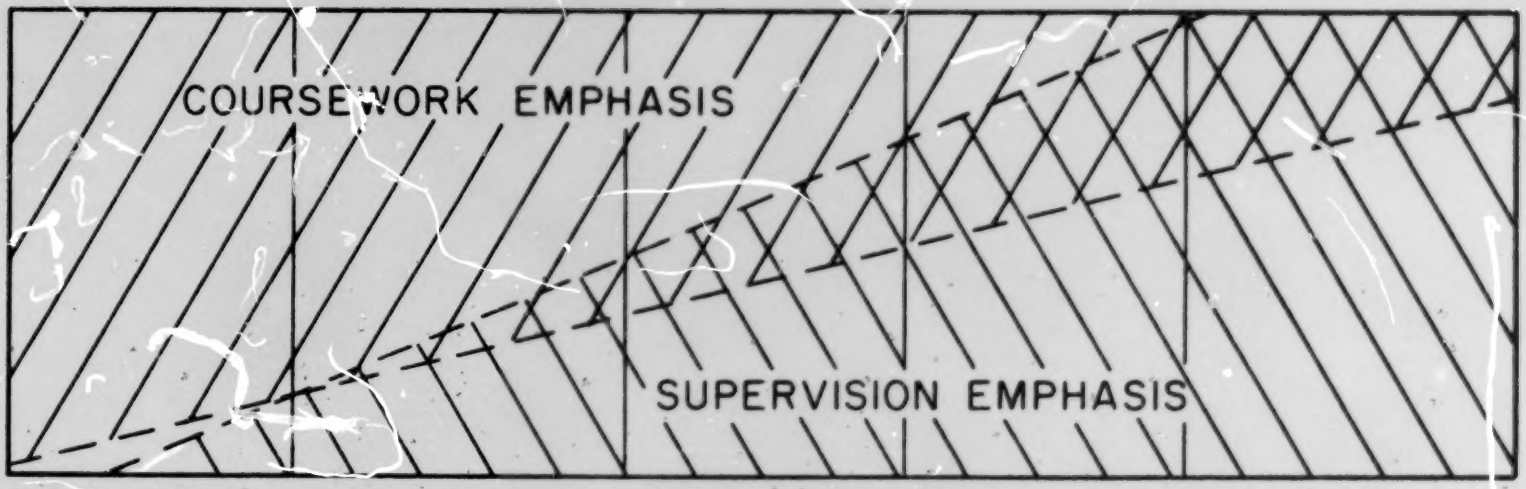
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SUPERVISION EMPHASIS
Foundations & Research
Assessment
Intervention
Professional Development
Externship/ Internship